Soaring Eagles Elementary School
Harrison School District

School Background

Soaring Eagles Elementary School has a diverse population of minority students (*N* = 379, 69%), English learners (*N* = 90, 16%), students with disabilities (*N* = 46, 8%), and students experiencing poverty (*N* = 307, 56%).

Table 1. School Demographics

2013-14 Student Population							
Total Enrollment:	**551**						
Grades Enrolled:	**K -5**						

	American Indian	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	White	Native Hawaiian	Two or More Races	Total Minority
Number:	5	21	88	218	172	7	40	379
Percent of Total:	0.9%	3.8%	16.0%	39.6%	31.2%	1.3%	7.3%	68.8%

	IEP	FRL	EL				
			Total*	NEP	LEP	FEP M1	FEP M2
Number:	46	307	90	6	67	15	2
Percent of Total:	8.3%	55.7%	16.3%	1.1%	12.2%	2.7%	0.4%

* Total EL population includes NEP, LEP, FEP monitor year 1 and FEP monitor year 2.

This school has one principal, two part-time assistant principals, and a staff of 30 general education teachers and 1 special education teacher working together to serve all students in the school. Over half (55%) of the teachers have been at the school for five years or less.

Table 2. Staff Statistics

Staff Statistics			
	0 to 5 years	6 to 15 years	16+ years
Prior years teaching experience in 2013-14	54.8%	38.7%	6.5%
	General	Special Ed.	Both (General/SPED)
Distribution of teachers in 2013-14	30	1	0

Exemplary Practices

- Distributed Leadership
- Staff Expectations
- Student Expectations
- Paraprofessional Program
- Full Day Kindergarten
- Quality Instruction
- Flooding Model
- Small Group Instruction
- Behavior Management
- Services for Students with Exceptional Needs

Selection Data

This school was identified based on the academic performance of four disaggregated groups, specifically, English learners, students with disabilities, minority students, and students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

For both TCAP content areas (reading and math), over half of the students eligible for free and reduced lunch were proficient or advanced in 2011, 2012, and 2013. The percent demonstrating proficiency on reading TCAP steadily increased from 2011 (70%) to 2013 (77%). An even higher percent were proficient or advanced on math TCAP (81 to 86 percent).

Similarly, for both content areas, more than half of minority students and students with disabilities were also proficient or advanced on TCAP each year. Across the years, of the minority students tested on the state assessment, over 70 percent demonstrated proficiency on reading TCAP and over 80 percent on math TCAP. The percent of students with disabilities who were proficient or advanced in 2012 was 60 percent in reading and 75 percent in math. These percentages decreased slightly in 2013, but remained at or above 50 percent.

During the three years, the percent of English learners demonstrating proficiency on math TCAP ranged from 73 to 81 percent. On reading TCAP, 44 percent of English learners were proficient or advanced in 2011, with the percentages increasing to over 60 percent in 2012 and 2013.

Table 3. Disaggregated Achievement Data Used in Identification of Schools

			IEP	FRL	Minority	EL				
						Total***	NEP	LEP	FEP M1	FEP M2
Reading	2011		*N* <16	70%	75%	44%	*N* <16	31%	*N* <16	*N* <16
	2012		60%	76%	82%	69%	*N* <16	66%	*N* <16	*N* <16
	2013		55%	77%	81%	60%	*N* <16	64%	*N* <16	N/A
			IEP	FRL	Minority	EL				
						Total***	NEP	LEP	FEP M1	FEP M2
Math	2011		*N* <16	84%	87%	77%	*N* <16	72%	*N* <16	*N* <16
	2012		75%	86%	89%	81%	*N* <16	88%	*N* <16	*N* <16
	2013		68%	81%	83%	73%	*N* <16	81%	*N* <16	N/A

(Table heading: TCAP Achievement - Percent Proficient/Advanced**)

**TCAP achievement excludes duplicate SASIDs, students with missing SASIDs, students with invalidation codes of "Taking alternate assessment" or "Withdrew," and students that are October new to school. TCAP only includes tests administered in English.
***Total EL population for TCAP includes all NEP, LEP, and FEP students.

This school has received an overall School Performance Framework (SPF) rating of Performance for the prior three years (2011, 2012, and 2013), as well as a "Meets" rating on the Academic Achievement indicator in 2011 and 2013, and an "Exceeds" rating on that indicator in 2012.

Table 4. Performance Frameworks Data

School Performance Frameworks			
	2011	2012	2013
Official SPF Rating	Performance	Performance	Performance
Official SPF % Pts	75.1	82.3	79.1
1-Yr SPF % Pts	75.1	82.3	79.1
Official Academic Achievement	Meets	Exceeds	Meets
1-Yr Academic Achievement	Meets	Exceeds	Meets

Study Methodology

Prior to the Onsite Visit: Documents Reviewed

A variety of documents were reviewed prior to onsite school visit, including documents available on the school and district websites, school improvement goals, and the Unified Improvement Plan for the school. Upon arrival at the school, a binder of documents was provided for review, including school calendars, sample communications and fliers, Response to Intervention (RtI) and special education forms, school handbooks and policies, PLC forms, agendas and meeting notes, assessment segments, sample data, tools for tracking data, student plans, teacher evaluation rubrics and observations forms, sample curricula, and other resources and tools.

During the Onsite Visit: Interviews, Observations, and Focus Groups

Soaring Eagles Elementary School's onsite visit consisted of 16.92 hours of interview (N = 20), 10.25 hours of focus groups (N = 13), and 11.42 hours of observations (N = 15).

Table 5. Onsite Interviews, Observations, and Focus Groups

Interviews		Focus Groups		Observations		Total	
N	Hours	N	Hours	N	Hours	N	Hours
20	16.92	13	10.25	15	11.42	48	38.58

Following the Onsite Visit: Surveys

Twenty-four staff members from Soaring Eagles completed the Personnel Survey, 20 (83%) of whom were teachers. Five (21%) of the teachers were certified or licensed to work with special populations, and over half (N = 13; 54%) had been in their position at Soaring Eagles for 5 or more years.

Table 6. Personnel Survey Respondents

Position	Number of Respondents
Teacher	20
Administrator	2
Administrative Support Staff	1
Not Specified	1

Factors Common across All Study Schools

See report called "High Achieving Schools Study: Common Practices and Procedures across Schools."

Exemplary Practices

Distributed Leadership - Leadership[1]

The school has two part-time assistant principals who share leadership responsibilities across the building with the principal. The three have very different but compatible leadership styles. They also have a very unified vision for the school and beliefs regarding the role of principals (to reduce barriers for the instructional staff so that they can succeed in their jobs). They know each other very well and capitalize on each other's strengths in supporting the teaching staff and students of the school.

Having multiple administrators allows for delegation and distribution of administrative responsibilities. It also enhances accessibility of the administrative team, as teachers felt like there was someone they could approach with concerns or new ideas. Teachers and paraprofessionals interviewed reported having ongoing access to the school leaders and feeling supported by them. As often as possible, the leadership team seeks input on decision-items. For example, staff is involved in purchasing decisions, which creates buy-in. When it is necessary to make a top-down decision, communication is provided regarding the decision, why it was necessary to make the decision at the leadership level, and how the decision will support student achievement.

The school also has a leadership team with representatives from each grade level. From the time teachers are hired, grooming for leadership roles is begun by the principals. The function of the leadership team is modeling, mentoring, and facilitation rather than supervision and evaluation. When hiring, the principals search for candidates who have previous leadership experience (e.g., while in college served on a committee as chair). The principals develop relationships with all staff members and know their strengths and challenges. They ensure that each staff member is assigned to a role that allows him or her to use and build upon his or her strengths, and that all staff members have the opportunity to be leaders. All respondents to the Personnel Survey agreed (19 strongly agreed) that school administrators encourage teachers to take leadership roles in the school (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Distributed Leadership (Personnel Survey)
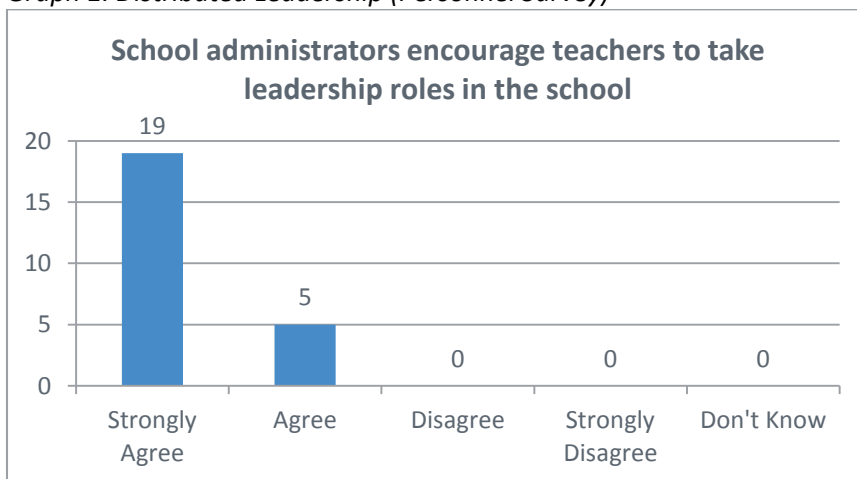
Every grade has a lead teacher who mentors the other teachers at that grade level. At the beginning of the year, the principals come in frequently, ask key questions, and then assign teachers a mentor, based on strengths and weaknesses. Experienced teachers serve as mentors, instructional coaches, and content experts. They lead team

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[1] In this report, the red font following the title of a subsection denotes the Standard from the Colorado Standards and Indicators for Continuous Improvement that is represented in this component.
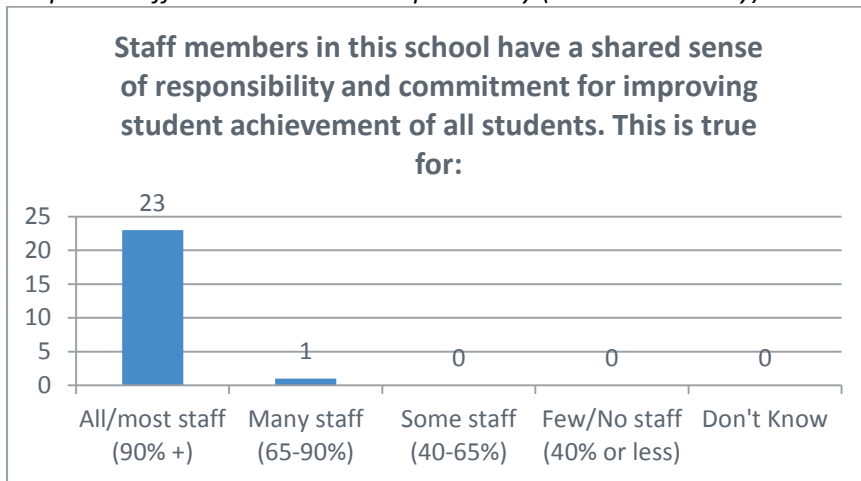
meetings and serve as liaisons between administration and grade level teams. Despite the increased work load, grade level team leaders reported both enjoyment and personal satisfaction in their roles as leaders.
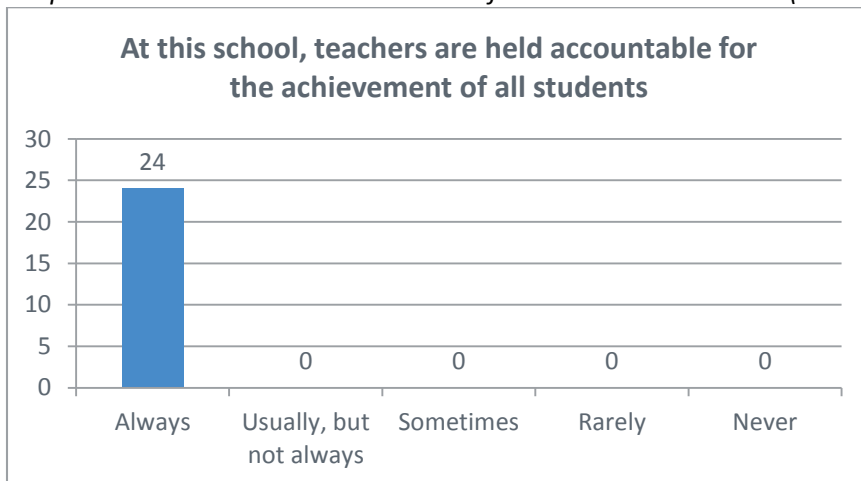
Staff Expectations - Leadership, Culture and Climate

The expectation that all staff members are responsible for teaching all students and held accountable are non-negotiable policies, as evidenced by over 95 percent of respondents indicating, on the Personnel Survey, that staff members feel responsible for improving achievement of all students (see Graph 2). This shared sense of accountability is illustrated by responses to the Personnel Survey, in which 100 percent of respondents indicated that teachers are always held accountable for all students' achievement (see Graph 3). Teachers are expected to work hard and achieve results. If they are struggling, they will receive the help they need through co-planning or administrative support. A number of teachers noted the willingness of the principal or assistant principals to model classroom management and instructional techniques. The administrators were frequently in the classrooms, allowing administrators to offer suggestions and feedback on effective strategies.

Graph 2. Staff Members Share Responsibility (Personnel Survey)

Staff members in this school have a shared sense of responsibility and commitment for improving student achievement of all students. This is true for:

All/most staff (90% +)	23
Many staff (65-90%)	1
Some staff (40-65%)	0
Few/No staff (40% or less)	0
Don't Know	0

Graph 3. Teachers are Held Accountable for Student Achievement (Personnel Survey)

At this school, teachers are held accountable for the achievement of all students

Always	24
Usually, but not always	0
Sometimes	0
Rarely	0
Never	0

The high expectations begin even with the hiring process, in which the principal sets some baseline non-negotiables in the characteristics of whom she will hire. All applicants are screened for a high level of personal academic achievement

prior to consideration for an interview. During the interview process, there is a focus on identifying candidates with specific qualities such as initiative, leadership, work ethic, and personal high expectations.

Once hired, new teachers are provided with support, not only from building administrators, but also from grade level teachers. Grade level team leaders mentor their grade level peers' instructional planning and problem-solving. This modeling and mentoring structure helps new teachers feel supported and poised to succeed. The principals often see strengths in their teachers that the teachers do not see in themselves, and they draw out those strengths. An example of this is when a lesson is not effective, the principals first ask the teacher what he or she was trying to do. Then, they refer the teacher to another teacher who possesses the needed strengths and can effectively model that lesson.

The school leaders expect instructional staff to provide quality instruction and increase student academic achievement. As long as teachers are achieving results and meeting expectations, they are given liberty to make decisions and manage their own classrooms. Teachers feel that it is safe to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. The trust in their skills and abilities inspires them to work harder.

The principals treat their teachers like professionals and experts, and expect them to behave as such. When new methodologies or resources are provided by the district, teachers are given the time and freedom to discover how to best implement them. The principals let the teachers revise resources and make them their own. Because the principals are confident in their teachers, the teachers are confident in themselves. When asked about the principals, teachers noted that they make staff members feel good about themselves. The principals show their caring for each individual by leaving encouraging notes or treats in teachers' mailboxes, and after a hectic time, they buy breakfast or lunch. Successes and accomplishments are acknowledged, complimented, and celebrated.

Instruction for teachers is scaffolded in a deliberate way, but not in a way that teachers find overwhelming. While providing supervision, support, and modeling when needed, teachers are allowed to develop their own instructional styles and lessons. Teachers report a strong feeling of ownership for student success and acknowledge strong support from their principals. The sense of staff unity, trust, collaboration, and high standards is evident throughout the school.

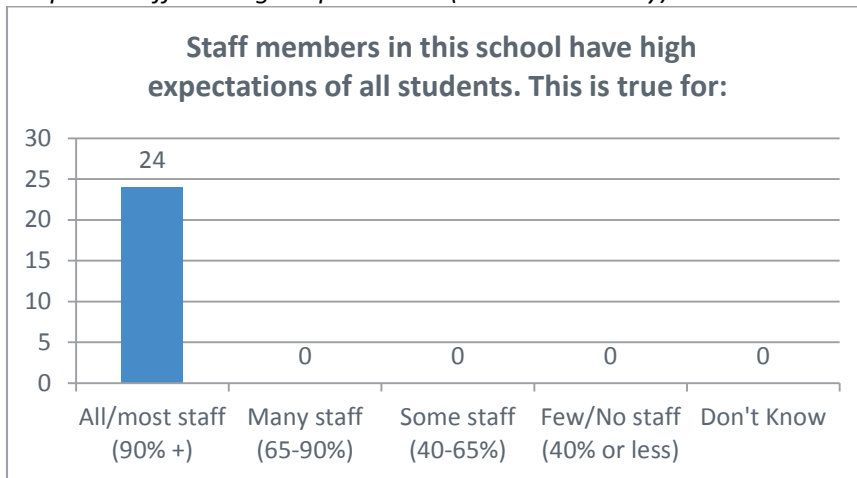## Student Expectations – Culture and Climate, Best First Instruction

During the onsite visit, classrooms and instructional materials were well-organized and structured for academic success. Items posted on the classroom walls were purposeful and anchored to grade level instruction. Learning targets were posted and discussed in each classroom.

Staff members were intentional about building expectations of future academic and life success into the culture and language of the classroom. Teachers use college-themed decorations and group names and regularly discuss going to college as an expectation for the elementary school students. Students in an advanced math class are expected to take ownership of their learning and not primarily lean on the instructor. The teacher solicits responses for the daily challenge problem by stating, "I didn't look at this problem, so I hope there is a consensus in your answers." This class was not reserved exclusively for students identified as gifted and talented; rather, it provided a challenge for students of any ability level that were up to the challenge and rigor of the course.
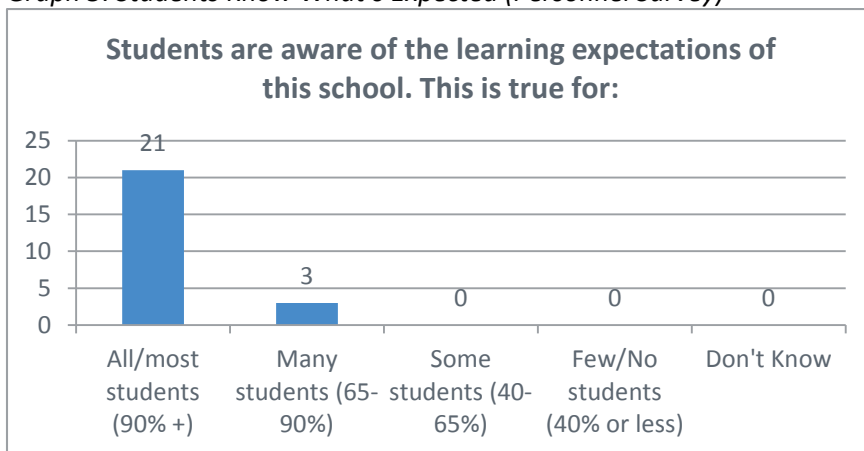
During classroom observations, it was clear that teachers have high expectations for students and that there is no allowance of excuse-making for why a student could not achieve. All 24 respondents to the Personnel Survey said that 90 percent or more of staff members have high expectations of all students (see Graph 4), and 21 said that 90 percent or more of students are aware of the learning expectations (see Graph 5). The no excuses policy is framed in and communicated as what is best for students. The students know and could articulate in interviews that if they have to stay in from recess to make up work, it is because their education is a priority and the time will be valuably spent catching them up on their school work. Students are allowed to make mistakes as part of the learning process. They are

expected to have a strong work ethic and work hard, and if students need support and encouragement, they receive it. The expectations are high, but the staff will help them get to where they need to be.

Graph 4. Staff Has High Expectations (Personnel Survey)

Staff members in this school have high expectations of all students. This is true for:

Category	Value
All/most staff (90% +)	24
Many staff (65-90%)	0
Some staff (40-65%)	0
Few/No staff (40% or less)	0
Don't Know	0

Graph 5. Students Know What's Expected (Personnel Survey)

Students are aware of the learning expectations of this school. This is true for:

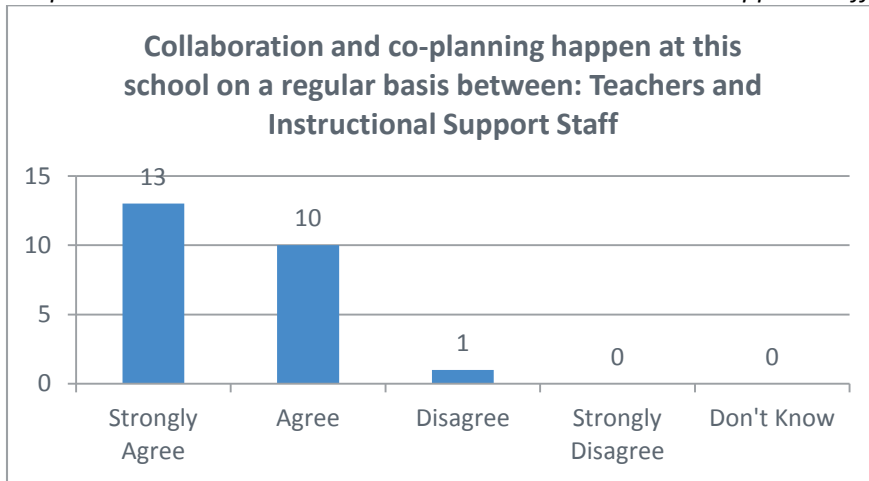| Category	Value
All/most students (90% +)	21
Many students (65-90%)	3
Some students (40-65%)	0
Few/No students (40% or less)	0
Don't Know	0

Paraprofessional Program

Soaring Eagles is intentional about their recruitment, retention, and training of paraprofessionals. The paraprofessionals interviewed had been with the school for multiple years, with several reporting that they had been with the school for seven or eight years. Paraprofessionals work with one of the assistant principals to build their capacity and monitor their practices throughout the year. They are provided training on the interventions they implement, often receiving the same training as the teachers. There are opportunities for paraprofessionals to collaborate with classroom teachers during their professional learning communities and data meetings (the Personnel Survey indicated that they took advantage of these opportunities; see below) and paraprofessionals attend staff meetings. Teachers regularly reach out to paraprofessionals and solicit their input on student progress and learning styles as well as their reflections on instructional practices (see Graph 6). Paraprofessionals have progress monitoring assessments that they use to track their students and share the information with classroom teachers. The expectation is that interventions are implemented as needed with the goal of catching students up and then removing their interventions. The distributions of students that each paraprofessional works with are fluid and regularly reconceived. Paraprofessionals have the opportunity to develop close personal relationships with students and are able to advocate for them in meetings with classroom teachers.

Soaring Eagles is also intentional about assignment of paraprofessionals to classrooms. There are two classifications of paraprofessional: instructional and non-instructional. Experienced, instructional paraprofessionals are assigned to work with newer teachers, and newer paraprofessionals are assigned to work with more experienced teachers. Paraprofessionals may also be placed in certain classrooms according to their specific skill sets. There is a belief and expectation that instructional paras develop and utilize their instructional capacity to add value to the core instructional program and interventions at the school. While instructional paraprofessionals may have non-classroom duties as part of their day, the primary behavior management duties are the responsibility of the non-instructional paraprofessionals. The one concern expressed by instructional paraprofessionals was their compensation system. Each of them remarked that they were only able to maintain their position because of other sources of financial support. One mentioned that she was primarily compensated with benefits, and the assistant principal remarked that this was not unique. This is likely a common reality across schools and districts, but must be considered when building sustainability of a paraprofessional program that adds value to the instructional program of a school.

Graph 6: Collaboration between Teachers and Instructional Support Staff (Personnel Survey)

Collaboration and co-planning happen at this school on a regular basis between: Teachers and Instructional Support Staff

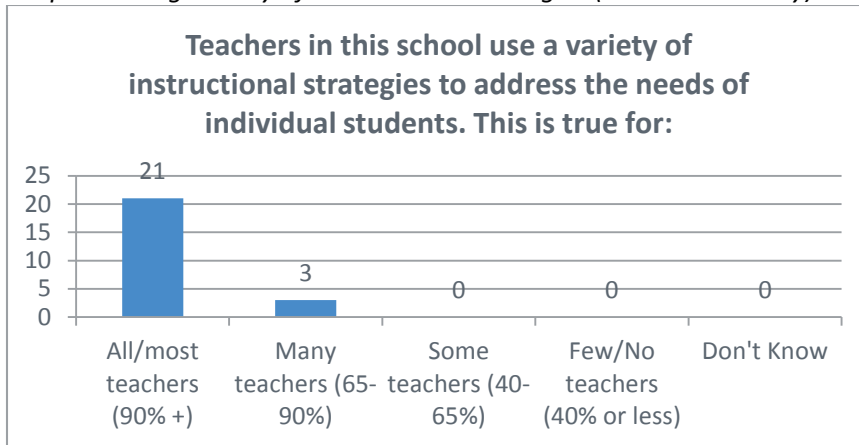| Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
13	10	1	0	0

Full Day Kindergarten
Kindergarten aged students at Soaring Eagles Elementary are able to attend a full day of school in an academically based program. In preparation for kindergarten enrollment, the school hosts Kindergarten Round Up, where individual screenings of students' emerging academic talents and challenges are conducted. These are conducted during the day as well as in the evening to meet family schedules and increase participation. Information from the screenings is used to begin building the following fall's kindergarten classes and flooding schedules.
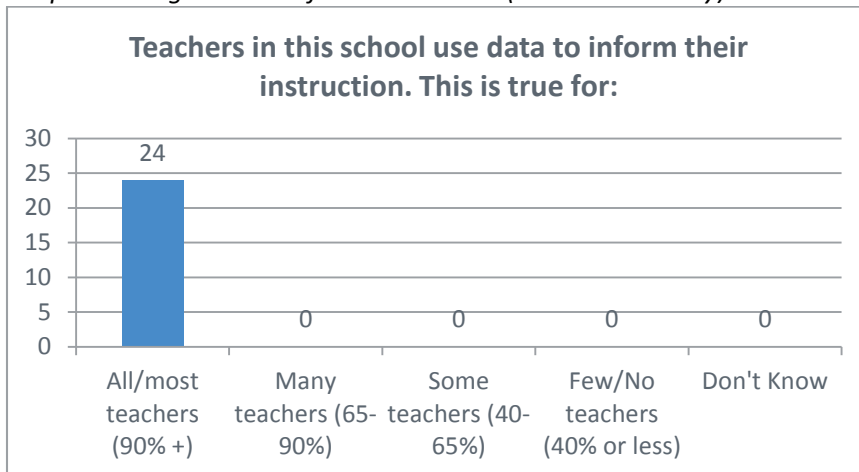
Quality Instruction – Best First Instruction, Standards and Instructional Planning
According to the Personnel Survey, instruction is intentional and deliberate, with teachers using data and a variety of strategies (see Graphs 7 & 8).

Graph 7. Using Variety of Instructional Strategies (Personnel Survey)

Teachers in this school use a variety of instructional strategies to address the needs of individual students. This is true for:

Category	Value
All/most teachers (90% +)	21
Many teachers (65-90%)	3
Some teachers (40-65%)	0
Few/No teachers (40% or less)	0
Don't Know	0

Graph 8. Using Data to Inform Instruction (Personnel Survey)

Teachers in this school use data to inform their instruction. This is true for:

Category	Value
All/most teachers (90% +)	24
Many teachers (65-90%)	0
Some teachers (40-65%)	0
Few/No teachers (40% or less)	0
Don't Know	0

Many factors contribute to the quality of instruction, several of which were noted during the onsite visit. The district has established a solid foundation in curriculum and student expectations for learning. Teachers and staff have access to and utilize customized versions of district resources. Teachers clearly have common academic vocabulary they use with students. Classroom structures and management are similar across classrooms, and students therefore know what to expect and how to behave; this allows teachers to focus on instruction rather than on behavior management. Teachers do not allow excuses, and learning is an expectation for all students.

Hiring and recruiting practices result in a staff of high achieving, goal-oriented personnel. The school has an effective working relationship with University of Colorado-Colorado Springs and Colorado College for placing student teachers, which increases the school's options in selecting high quality staff. There are systems in place for sharing best practices among staff, including the mentoring model previously mentioned and video recording effective lessons to share with each other.

Data Use
Grade level data binders are maintained and shared at the school. Each grade level uses a tracking sheet that was developed to meet needs and create ease of use for those teachers. The assistant principal reviews all data binders and monitors use and progress monthly. Data binders move up with the students across grades. Therefore, the following year's teachers have direct access to the prior years' data.

A centrally-located data board is used to track student progress of all students. The board provides a quick and easy visual of how students are progressing, which illustrates the school's performance as a whole. The board is updated monthly and is available during meetings for reference.

Multiple trainings are provided to teachers on tracking and using data. Principals, teachers, and paraprofessionals have attended various district trainings on data management. The assistant principal assesses teachers' and paraprofessionals' data use and provides more targeted training to improve reliance on and use of data.

Best First Instruction for English Learners
Most of the teachers have participated in district-offered training in Kagan structures for English learners. These structures promote positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction (http://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/279/Kagan-Structures-for-English-Language-Learners). Specific strategies observed at Soaring Eagles include sentence frames, vocabulary instruction, vocabulary walls, pair share, native language support, visuals, choral response, thumbs up/down, rhymes, video, individual white boards, and physical movement. The teachers clearly describe their expectations for the students and often have the students repeat or explain the objective or the instructions.

Pacing—Down Time Minimized
Teachers at Soaring Eagles taught bell to bell, taking full advantage of every possible second in order to maximize instructional time. Although much of the instruction involved children rotating in small groups (see flooding model below), the schedule works like clockwork, with scheduled rotations occurring very quickly and on the dot. Students clearly know the routines and have a sense of time. Teachers use timers and count down. In a kindergarten classroom that was observed during the onsite visit, the teacher gave students exactly 30 seconds to play with a slinky before using the slinky to segment words. Students played for exactly 30 seconds and stopped as soon as the teacher said stop. In a fourth grade math class, students were given exactly 1 minute to doodle on their white boards before the teacher started giving them problems to solve. Again, the students all stopped when their minute was up. Although teachers used a number of different tools and materials in their lessons, the tools had obviously been selected in advance and were easily accessible. Time was not wasted looking for the necessary tool or material.

Flooding Model - Standards and Planning, Best First Instruction
The staff at Soaring Eagles Elementary utilizes a flooding model that is based on student similarities and instructional level. They have built their daily schedules to afford each grade level a specific time for intensified, instructionally focused small group instruction. These times are spread throughout the day in order to maximize the use of all available adults. Staff members interviewed indicated that they have refined this practice over the course of ten years. Flooding time is considered "sacred" time and is protected from all other instructional demands. The small groupings are fluid, changes are informed by evidence and student data, and changes are discussed during grade level Professional Development Community times (PLC). The success of this approach has thrived as a result of increased professional training for the instructional paraprofessionals. While grade level teachers carefully plan specific lessons, paraprofessionals are trained in professional methods and provided with practice and feedback. Preparation for building a student needs flooding model starts as early as kindergarten Round Up, where potential kindergarteners for the following year are individually assessed each spring.

Small Group Instruction - Standards and Planning, Best First Instruction
Teachers use data to group students for daily instructional rotations in small groups. The groups are fluid, and students are moved based on needs identified through progress monitoring data. Interventions for English learners and students with disabilities were also rated highly with 21 (88%) respondents on the Personnel Survey rating them as "excellent" or "good" (see Graphs 9 & 10).

Graph 9. English Learners in Pull-out Programs (Personnel Survey)

How would you rate the instruction for English learners? In Intervention or pull-out programs
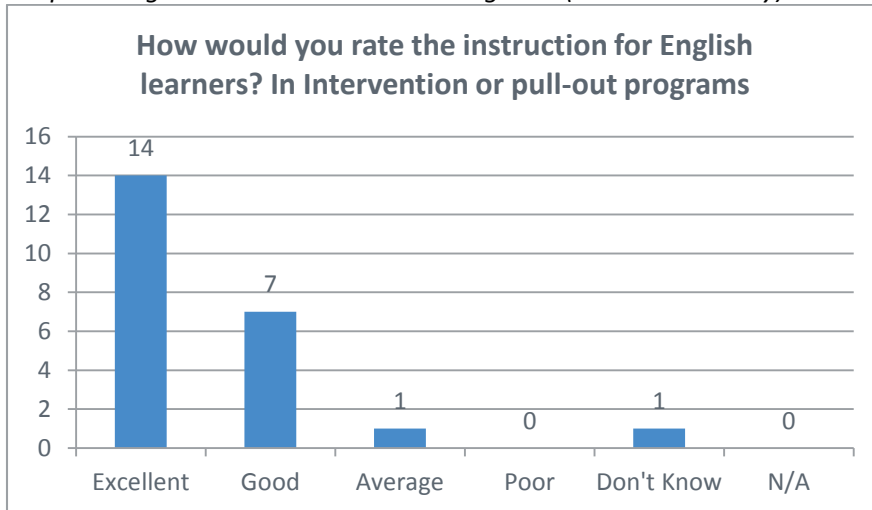
Graph 10. Students with Disabilities in Pull-out Programs (Personnel Survey)

How would you rate the instruction for students with disabilities? In Intervention or pull-out programs
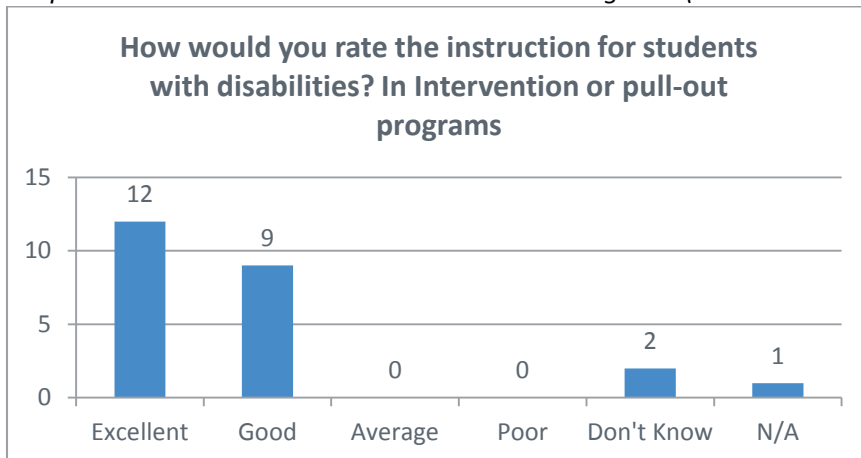
Behavior Management - Climate and Culture

Students wear uniforms to ensure that there is no visual difference in appearance and to bring commonality to all students in attendance. The staff has common expectations for student behavior across the school building, as evidenced by the Personnel Survey (see Graph 11). The philosophy is that the behavior must come first so that the instructional strategies will be effective. The school has a clearly established PBIS program implemented (SOAR).

Graph 11. Students' Behavioral Expectations (Personnel Survey)

Student behavioral expectations are explicit and consistently reinforced by the staff. This is true for:

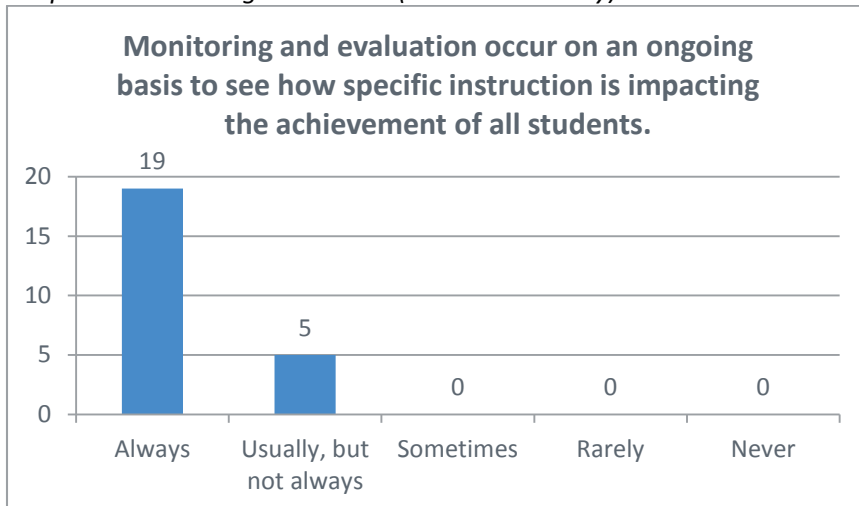| Category	Value
All/most staff (90% +)	23
Many staff (65-90%)	1
Some staff (40-65%)	0
Few/No staff (40% or less)	0
Don't Know	0

Services for Students with Exceptional Needs (including those with disabilities and gifted/talented)

Scheduling and instructional practices at Soaring Eagles Elementary School exemplify the concept that "All means all." Students with disabilities receive the bulk of their academic instruction and intervention within the framework of general education. Leadership and teachers at this school believe that first best instruction must meet the needs of all students. This is evidenced in the Personnel Survey, where 79 percent of respondents indicated that evaluation always occurs on an ongoing basis to see the impact of instruction (see Graph 12). Access to multiple interventions is not contingent upon special education eligibility and is offered at the earliest point of academic difficulty. Additionally, students who demonstrate a need for enhanced academic rigor are also offered opportunities to participate in "gifted programming." Interventions are not provided in traditional tiers, but generously utilized to alleviate student academic difficulties.

Interventions are offered before, during, and after school by teachers and instructional paraprofessionals who have received specific professional development in the interventions being utilized.

Graph 12. Evaluating Instruction (Personnel Survey)

Monitoring and evaluation occur on an ongoing basis to see how specific instruction is impacting the achievement of all students.

Category	Value
Always	19
Usually, but not always	5
Sometimes	0
Rarely	0
Never	0

Where can I learn more?

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